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ABSTRACT

There is a positive relationship between a selected measure of test anxiety and several measures of self-perception. Hypotheses of concommitant decreases in self-esteem as test anxiety increased were offered. Subjects consisted of 193 undergraduate students (123 females and 70 males) enrolled in educational psychology and foundations of education courses. The Suinn Test Anxiety Behavior Scale (STABS) was administered as a measure of test anxiety. Three experimental scales developed by the author were used as measures of self-esteem, perception of intellectual competence and personal control. Results support the view that increased levels of test anxiety may be associated with devaluative and disparaging thoughts. Research implications point to the possibility of increased positive perceptions of intellectual competence, self-esteem, and self-control concommitant with treatment interventions designed to alleviate excessive anxiety levels. (Author)

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Test Anxiety and Perception of Self:

A Correlational Study

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I. Introduction

The psychological literature has documented the negative effects of test anxiety upon academic performance (Alpert and Haber, 1960; Mandler and Sarason, 1952; Paul and Eriksen, 1964; Sarason, 1960; Spielberger, 1966, 1975, 1976). Wine (1971) has described the high-test-anxious student as "...internally focused on self-evaluative, self-deprecatory thinking, and perception of his autonomic responses (pg. 92)." Meichenbaum (1972) further describes such students as characterized by feelings of inadequacy, punishment, and loss of self-esteem. In his attentional theory of test anxiety, Sarason (1975) points to response components of emotional reactivity and cognitive processes as being of primary importance. The cognitive component, e.g., telling oneself while taking an examination, "I am dumb", or "I am a failure", appear to "...exert a more consistent negative influence on performance than does emotionality (ibid., 176)."

In respect to current evidence regarding the tendency of test anxious students to negatively evaluate themselves, the present study has sought to determine the relationship of test anxiety level to various motivational constructs of

self-concept, perception of intelligence and personal control. Invew of the findings reported earlier, the following hypotheses were offered:

Hypothesis 1: As test anxiety level increases, a concommitant decrease in personal estimate of self-esteem will also occur.

Hypothesis 2: As test anxiety increases, a corresponding decrease in perception of intellectual competence attributed to the individual should also occur.

Hypothesis 3: As test anxiety increases, subjects will also show a tendency to assign personal control to others rather than to themselves.

II. Method

Subjects. Subjects participating in this study were 194 undergraduate students (123 females and 70 males) enrolled in educational psychology and foundations of education courses at a mid-western university.

Instrumentation. The Suinn Test Anxiety Behavior Scale (STABS) (Suinn, 1969) was administered as a measure of test anxiety. The STABS is a 50-item, self-report behavior scale composed of various situations which may arouse anxiety. Each response item is worded so as to allow the student to rate the degree of fear or apprehension the item evokes on a 5-point scale. (i.e., "Not at all" to "Very Much") Test-

retest reliability coefficients have been found to be .74 and .78 over a four-week and six-week retest interval, respectively (Suinn, 1969) Scale scores on the STABS correlate at about .60 with Sarason's (1957) Test Anxiety Scale (TAS).

The author has constructed a series of statements reflecting individual perceptions of self-esteem, perceptions of intellectual competence and personal control. These statements were responded to by the use of a 5-point, likert-type rating format. In general, these statements ask the subject to rate him/herself in regard to self-esteem, how they compare to others in terms of perceived intellectual functioning, and how much control they believe is exerted over them by others.

Procedure. The STABS was administered early in the semester during regularly scheduled class sessions. Subjects were informed that the scale described various situations that may arouse fear or apprehension. Included in the administration of the STABS were the above described items regarding self-perceptions. Ample time was given to all participants to complete the STABS as well as self-perception items.

III. Results

Pearson Product Moment correlations were found to support the theoretical predictions stated earlier. Among

all subjects, signficant correlations were found between total STABS score and self-esteem ratings, ($r = -.146$, $p < .02$); perceptions of intellectual functioning, ($r = -.212$, $p < .001$); and personal control ratings, ($r = .169$, $p < .01$).

IV. Discussion

The present data supports the hypotheses offered by this researcher in regard to the relationship between test anxiety and selected variables of self-perception. In general, the subjects exhibited a marked tendency to report decreased feelings of self-esteem, intellectual competence, and personal control as anxiety levels increased. These findings are consistent with literature earlier reviewed in this paper. The results support the view that increased levels of test anxiety may be associated with devaluative and disparaging thoughts on the part of students. Although not directly examined by this study, further research implications point to the possibility of increased positive perceptions of competence, self-esteem and self-control concommitant with treatment interventions designed to alleviate excessive levels of test anxiety.

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